

Kings, Lords, Knights And Serfs: Middle Schoolers Experience Middle Ages

For immediate release: April 11, 2006

Tampa, Fla.

Wrapped in a monarch's robe with a royal crown atop his head, sixth grader "King" Michael Fears grants a manor to each of the "lords" in his social studies class. "Knights" then negotiate with the lords for food in return for protection from invading enemies. Meanwhile, the rest of the students who are "serfs" remain dutifully tied to the land (their desks) by their social class (their shoelaces).

At Independent Day School-Corbett Campus (IDS-CC), teachers make history come alive for their students. Textbook lessons transform into compelling human drama through dynamic, participative experiences that involve the emotions and senses, as well as the mind.

On this day in Christina Thomas' sixth grade social studies class, for example, the room has been temporarily transformed into a feudal kingdom to help students understand why society was organized into this type of social pyramid during the Middle Ages. The goal is to give students the opportunity to experience abstract social studies concepts first hand, making history more personal and meaningful.

"What better way to learn history than to take a journey back in time to experience life during a particular age," said Thomas. "In this case, tying their shoelaces to their desks helps students understand the struggles of the serfs and how helpless they were. Having the knights pledge their loyalty to the lords emphasizes the knights' dependence on these powerful and wealthy aristocrats. It all brings to life a complex concept: why feudalism developed as a system of protection after the fall of the Roman Empire."

While some students learn successfully through textbooks and lectures, others learn best while interacting with others or by involving movement. Research has shown that the lessons that are most effective at engaging a diverse group of learners are those that are hands-on and involve more than one of the multiple intelligences. To help accomplish this goal, IDS-CC teachers use cutting edge educational materials provided by the Teachers' Curriculum Institute called "History Alive!®".

Classroom simulation, a technique used throughout IDS-CC, brings history to life by tapping into intrapersonal as well as body kinesthetic learning styles. Auditory and visual experiences are incorporated using more traditional methods of discussion and note-taking. Ample opportunity to reflect individually on the experience is provided immediately after the simulation via written questions, and a follow-up activity such as writing a diary entry helps students make personal connections to their own lives.

Addressing all of the multiple intelligences enables each student to find an approach that works for him or her so all students can be successful. Many of the simulation activities used in the middle school are

"Acting it out really helped me understand the role of the serfs in the Middle Ages," said Aymara Evans.

"It's so much easier to remember things that you experience," said Gianna Gamache.

Founded in 1968, Independent Day School-Corbett Campus is a fully accredited, independent school located in northwest Hillsborough County with 550 students from Pre-K3 through 8th grade. At IDS, all children experience learning in a nurturing and highly academic environment focused on excellence and developing a positive self-concept. IDS-CC has become recognized as an exemplary school with over 2,000 visitors observing and learning from and with IDS-CC teachers. For more information about IDS visit <http://www.idsyves.com>

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“Lords” Troy Mainzer, Luke Blankenship, Deuce Gruden, and Zack Dyer pledge their allegiance to “King” Michael Fears as serfs Sammi Beller and Gianna Gamache look on. This loyalty oath ensures the king that the lords will stand with him during the many battles for land that took place during the Middle Ages.



“Serf” Morgan Mills pays “Lord” Zack Dyer for land and protection. Morgan and Cortney Spagnuolo are bond to the land, as all serfs were during the Middle Ages. “Knight” Greg Tomlin looks on.



“Lord” Troy Mainzer knights Andrea Broad, fellow knight Ben McBride wanted to be a Troy's knight, but Andrea made him a better deal. Knights and lords had to barter to come to an agreement on what the knight would be paid for protecting the lords during the Middle Ages.